

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 1104

By Hardaway

A RESOLUTION to recognize and commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Memphis Sit-In Movement.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that members of this General Assembly should honor and commemorate those key events in our history that have advanced the ongoing struggle for civil and human rights and promoted racial equality in our State; and

WHEREAS, the Memphis Sit-In Movement is certainly one such historical campaign, which was part of a non-violent, direct action campaign to end racial segregation throughout the Bluff City; and

WHEREAS, prior to the Civil Rights Movement, Jim Crowism pervaded all aspects of life in Memphis and throughout the South, with a pattern of racial exclusiveness prevailing in Memphis's schools and public facilities, including libraries, restrooms, waiting areas, snack counters, transportation terminals, theaters, hotels, restaurants, and neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, Memphis African-Americans were permitted access to certain municipal facilities, such as the local zoo, only on one day of the week and were restricted to using only the Vance Avenue Library Branch; and

WHEREAS, in February of 1960, the Civil Rights Movement received an infusion of energy with a student-led sit-in at a Woolworth's store in Greensboro, North Carolina, and with Nashville becoming the first major city to begin desegregation of its public facilities on May 10, 1960, the Civil Rights Movement's principle of peaceful protest spread throughout the South; and

WHEREAS, active in the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement as a whole and instrumental in the Nashville Sit-In Movement in particular, LeMoyne College alumnus Marion S. Barry, returned to Memphis to encourage the students at Lemoyne College and Owen Junior College

to engage in nonviolent tactics against segregation and prepare the young activists, who included Clyde Battles, Doris Bethea, Rosetta Bonds, Parolee Boone, Jean Brown, Amanda Cambell, Ernestine Carpenter, Juanita Coleman, Robert Cox, Chester Collins, Mattie Daniels, Evander Ford, Gwendolyn Glover, J. Greer, George Hardin, Ernestine Henning, T. Heard, Carole Higgs, Burleigh Hines, John Hooks, RosaLee Ingram, Katie Mallory, Laverda McGee, Katie McMurtrey, Eddie Meacham, Grace Meacham, Elmer Moore, Rober Morris, Johnnie Naylor, Olly Neal, Virginia Owens-Hudsen, Lutrelle Palmer, Charles Patterson, Willie Shotwell, Ed Smith, Jean Smith, Peggy Townsend, Johnnie Turner, Dorothy Walk, Theodore Wells, and James Wilhite, to fundamentally change the social order of the day; and

WHEREAS, inspired by the courage of their peers in Montgomery, Greensboro, and Nashville and singing their National Anthem, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, a group of students from LeMoyne College and Owen Junior College launched their own Memphis Sit-In Movement on March 19, 1960, and with the philosophy of quiet strength, began to challenge the institutionalized policy of segregation through protests and sit-ins at the Memphis Public Library, Memphis's lunch counters, and numerous public facilities in humble defiance of the Jim Crow system; and

WHEREAS, while their ventures were always laudable, their victories sometimes remained elusive; after students participated in numerous peaceful sit-ins and were repeatedly arrested at the old Walgreens on Main Street, the store owners stubbornly chose to remove the store's diner rather than recognize the moral repugnance of segregation and integrate the lunch counter; and

WHEREAS, the Memphis Sit-In Movement was notable for its emphasis on disciplined nonviolence, but its demonstrators were often met with bitter violence and unjust arrests; with brutish mobs heckling outside, the students nibbled on bologna, cold grits, and black coffee inside their cold jail cells and relished their police records as badges of honor and proof of participation in the glorious Movement of 1960; and

WHEREAS, derided as militants and radicals, these intrepid students were blackballed by many of the Memphis citizenry and local businesses, and some were forced to leave the state in order gain employment; and

WHEREAS, the consequences of the students' quiet defiance continued for years to come, not only from their community, but also from their school; even though LeMoyne College was an historically African-American institution, founded in 1862 to provide freedmen an education, its president, Hollis F. Price, threatened the students with punitive consequences if they dared to participate in the movement; and

WHEREAS, girded with a belief that challenging the despicable bigotry and racial violence that plagued Memphis would stimulate their great city to grow toward the maturity of a truly just and equitable society, these brave young men and women struck an immutable blow against segregation and the perpetuation of racial inequality, inspired freedom-loving people throughout the world, and fueled a new quest for justice among Americans so long aggrieved; and

WHEREAS, sadly, this pivotal movement failed to attract the attention and honor that were bestowed upon other valiant endeavors, and these students have not received the acknowledgement they deserve for their courageous actions that, ultimately, helped shape the history of our country; currently, the unsung heroes of Memphis's 1960 Sit-In Movement are campaigning to erect proper historical markers and monuments and are producing an audio-visual project in order to share their remarkable story with the world; and

WHEREAS, this General Assembly wholeheartedly embraces the noble ideals and worthy goals of the Memphis Sit-In Movement; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, that we recognize and commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Memphis Sit-In Movement and honor the seminal group of students who participated in the Movement for their unparalleled pursuit of justice and equality for all Tennesseans.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.